

Newsletter

Conference on Basic Writing

A special interest group of CCCC



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CRITICAL ISSUES IN BASIC WRITING: 1992

Update on Planning for the October Conference

Carolyn Kirkpatrick
Eugene Hammond

Announcements of our October conference rolled off the press just in the nick of time for distribution at CCCC and have generated a flood of fine proposals for the program—nearly 250, at last count. This fourth National Basic Writing Conference promises to be a memorable gathering, with David Bartholomae as featured speaker and plenary panelists Mary Jo Berger Tom Fox, Karen Greenberg, Jeanne Gunner, Bill Jones, and Jerrie Cobb Scott addressing the conference theme, "Critical Issues in Basic Writing." Lynn Troyka will moderate a closing discussion for all conference participants.

The meeting will be held at the University of Maryland Conference Center on the College Park campus, located near the beltway on the outskirts of Washington DC. We urge you to take advantage of the long Columbus Day weekend to leave the trenches for two days of intellectual R & R. Brochures with detailed registration information are on their way from NCTE, if not already in your hands. As we wrote in the fall newsletter, this will be an affordable conference: The registration fee of \$80 covers lunch on Friday and Saturday, as well as materials and a Friday evening reception. Housing in the Conference Center costs as little as \$30 a night.

The meeting will begin on Thursday evening, October 8th, with dinner and a "starting places" session, Peter Adams to act as speaker and master of ceremonies. The conference proper will open on Friday morning with David Bartholomae's keynote address and continue with concurrent sessions and plenary panels through Saturday afternoon. The rich and varied program will be focused entirely on basic writing programs and practice. Conference attendees will be able to take part in on-campus or Washington DC events and entertainment on Friday and Saturday evenings.

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A Letter from the Rez

The Best of Times and the Worst of Times at Oglala Lakota College

Jeanne Smith

"Life on the Pine Ridge Reservation is like being inside a large, brown bottle," said one of my basic writing students a few weeks ago. "When you look outside, everything is colored by the bottle, and you can't get out because the neck of the bottle is too small." Another student said, "Living on the Pine Ridge Reservation is like being in a play where everyone seems to know what part they are playing—except me." As these students were talking, the opening lines of *A Tale of Two Cities* flashed into my mind: "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." That's Pine Ridge.

The Best of Times: The Land

Up until a few weeks ago, it was the best of times. Driving the 240 mile round trip to my World Literature class in Wanblee, South Dakota, was pure pleasure. Located in the far northeast corner of the Pine Ridge Reservation, Wanblee is a small village of approximately 1000 Oglala (Lakota) people. The highway winds through rolling short grass prairie occasionally dotted with pine and cedar. Periodically the road dips down into valleys carved through the centuries to create spectacular badlands formations, echoes of the deeper, more spectacular canyons to the north in the Badlands National Monument. It is the landscape made famous in the film *Dances with Wolves*, and when the day is warm, the sky a deep autumn blue, nothing can beat the vast, open freedom one feels in such a land.

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From the Chairs

Executive Committee Call

Three new executive committee members were elected this spring: Juanita Lewis from Bennett College in North Carolina, Kay Puttock from Mankato State University in Minnesota, and Karen Uehling from Boise State University in Idaho. In addition, we have elected Jeanne Gunner from UCLA as our new associate chair. We welcome these new members with great enthusiasm.

The executive committee meets at the beginning and end of CCCC each year (and corresponds regularly) to plan for our annual meetings, the newsletter, and other CBW activities. Three new members are elected each year, so we're always looking for people willing to involve themselves more actively in the organization.

This is a formal call for volunteers for the CBW executive committee and other activities. Members of the executive committee should have experience in basic writing, an interest in working with the organization, and ideas about the future of CBW. If you would be willing to serve, send a current vita and a letter discussing your interests to Suellen Duffey, The Writing Workshops, 1961 Tuttle Park Place, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210.

Personal Note

Jeanne Gunner not only was elected associate chair of CBW this spring, but also gave birth to a daughter, Katherine Rose Muller. Congratulations to Jeanne and her husband, Bob Muller.

From the Old Chair

Stepping down after four rewarding years of chairing

this organization, I want to say a few words about the work we do. I start with the belief that the teaching of basic writing is important—as important as anything being done in higher education. Often we are the last chance at college-level education for students who have plenty of ability but who have not been served well previously or who have not taken advantage of the opportunities offered. Last chances are important, so the work we do is almost always important. Further, we are one of the few areas in the academy where differences between students are reduced rather than exaggerated;

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we are the equivalent of "income redistribution" in higher education; our efforts serve to reduce the gap between the most and the least successful.

Because the teaching of basic writing is so important, the work of this organization is similarly important. We represent the interests of our students within the many competing interests of CCCC. In my view, CBW's most important role is to insure CCCC continues to provide a place where teachers of basic writing feel that their need are being addressed and to insure that the considerable intelligence of the combined membership of CCCC continues to address the thorny problems involved in teaching basic writers.

Because the work we do is important, I was concerned at this year's CCCC to find, for the first time, that in the section of this year's convention program where sessions are listed by category, there is no longer a separate category for basic writing; we are lumped together with first-year composition. This change may have been motivated by either or both of two considerations:

The *CBW Newsletter* is published twice a year, in the fall and spring, by the Conference on Basic Writing, a special interest group of the Conference on College Communication and Composition. The editors are Peter Dow Adams & Carolyn Kirkpatrick. Opinions expressed in these pages are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors, the officers of CBW, CBW's Executive Committee, or CCCC.

Membership in the Conference on Basic Writing is \$5 for 1 year, \$9 for 2 years, and \$12 for 3 years and includes a subscription to the *CBW Newsletter*. Address: Peter Dow Adams, Department of English, Essex Community College, Baltimore, MD 21237.

- a recognition that, on the theoretical level, teaching writing on the basic level has much in common with teaching writing at the freshman level;
- a low number of proposals in the area of basic writing.

I suspect that both were factors. I *know* that over the past four years the number of basic writing sessions has declined from twelve in 1989 to just six this past year.

Because the work we do is important, I urge the members of CBW to submit proposals for CCCC sessions in the future that address basic writing issues.

Because the work we do is important, I want to

Because the work we do is important . . .

invite—no, to urge—each of you to consider more active participation in CBW. I hope you will come to the national conference next October (see article on page 1), I hope you will volunteer to write for this newsletter, and I hope you will volunteer to serve on the executive committee. CBW is a truly open organization; no “in group” runs things. Generally, those who have served on the executive committee did not know any of the others on the committee before they were elected. So don’t be bashful. Send us your name and let us know you are willing to contribute.

Because the work we do is important, I am grateful to the talented and thoughtful group of people who have served with me on the executive committee over the past four years. It has been a great pleasure to listen to the ongoing conversation as we have worked together to attempt to steer this organization. And I am most grateful to the bright, well-organized, and tactful Carolyn Kirkpatrick, who, in her role as associate chair, is responsible, in large measure, for whatever effectiveness I have achieved as chair.

Because the work we do is important, I am very happy that the next chair of CBW is Suellynn Duffey, from Ohio State University, who has contributed much to the organization over the past four years and will, I’m certain, lead us into greater success in the future.

Peter Dow Adams
Essex Community College
Baltimore, Maryland

From the New Chair

It’s with great pleasure—as well as some trepidation—that I assume the role of CBW chair. I feel pleasure because of the excitement and promise CBW holds for me (and I hope for all of us) and trepidation because of the high standards of leadership that Peter Adams and Carolyn Kirkpatrick have set over the last several years.

Since the reconception of CBW in 1988, when I first became aware of its existence, I have found the organization to be a source of thought-provoking discussion, healthy challenges to my views, and solid professional friendships. What has been of greatest value for me as a member of the organization has been the possibility for interaction with a constantly growing number of US—basic writing instructors and scholars throughout the country. We are a varied bunch, and we each have such extraordinary experiences and expertise. I have gained more than I can say from the people

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in the Conference on Basic Writing. I hope that during my years as chair, you will each help me make CBW a place/spot/organization where we come to know each other more and more, to value each other’s differences, and thus to take more richly inspired teaching to our students. I look forward to the next two years.

Suellynn Duffey
Ohio State University

October BW Conference

Continued from page 1.

Featured speaker David Bartholomae is well known to all of us in CBW. An influential theorist in the area of basic writing, he is past chair of CCCC and chaired the second MLA Literacy Conference in September 1990. His publications include co-authorship with Anthony Petrosky of *Facts Artifacts. and Counterfacts* (Boynton-Cook), which describes a pioneering basic reading/writing curriculum so persuasively that many have been inspired to adapt it to their local settings.

The 1992 conference theme of "critical issues" evolved out of concerns expressed in our CCCC interest group about appropriate pedagogy, about what

Has the label "basic writing" lost its usefulness?

some of us see as an eroding institutional commitment to at-risk students, and about the place of basic writing professionals within our national organization. As Peter Adams mentions in his remarks beginning on page 2, the number of sessions labelled "basic writing" at CCCC this past March was so small that the basic writing sessions were grouped together with freshman writing as a special interest strand. Does diminishing presence on the CCCC program indicate diminishing interest in this area that sparked the study of composition in the 70s? Or does it perhaps reflect a diminishing usefulness of the label "basic writing" as new and exciting perspectives vie for attention?

We've invited each of the plenary panelists to focus on a specific issue that he or she sees as crucial to our professional definition, raising questions for consideration and discussion throughout our time together. To encourage this ongoing conversation, lunches in common and a Friday evening reception are built into the schedule. The conference will close with a Saturday afternoon session-of-the-whole for which Lynn Troyka will serve as moderator, encouraging panelists to address one another's presentations and inviting members of the audience to raise questions of their own. Out of all this talk we hope a conference publication will emerge, something more than just "proceedings."

Concurrent sessions in four time blocks will feature

an array of papers, panels, and workshops on themes of high interest, among them:

- Rereading *Errors and Expectations*: On the fifteenth anniversary of its publication, what do we now discover or rediscover in this work that virtually defined the field of basic writing?
- A FAC Network: How is the approach to basic reading/writing instruction described in *Facts Artifacts and Counterfacts* being adapted to differing settings and students?
- Adopting portfolio assessment in basic writing courses, with Audrey Roth: What are some of the difficulties of adopting portfolio evaluation? How does this approach support writing development?
- A workshop on publication for teachers of basic writing with members of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Basic Writing* and editors Bill Bernhardt and Peter Miller: What do these readers look for in a manuscript? What common weaknesses do they see in works submitted, and how can these be avoided? How can writers make use of reader feedback to improve their chances for publication?

We expect to provide a strand of sessions offering guidance to new teachers of basic writing, as well as many sessions giving veterans an opportunity to share their discoveries and discuss their differences.

In our role as conference chairs, we've been orchestrating a broad effort and receiving much support. We owe a special debt to Sallyanne Fitzgerald, "onlie begetter" of the National Basic Writing Conference, which she established, organized, and chaired at the University of Missouri-St. Louis in 1985, 1987, and 1989. Her wise words of experience at key moments have made our tasks infinitely easier. Past and present members of CBW's executive committee have been reading proposals and making recommendations for the program.

Finally, thanks to all who have contributed proposals; by the time you receive this newsletter, our response to your proposal should be on its way. We plan to mail the conference program to registrants in September.

Here's looking forward to October 8th!

For more information about the conference, contact Gene Hammond, Department of English, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. Phone: 301/405-3807. For registration materials, contact John Garvey, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801. Phone 217/328-3870, X282.

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The Worst of Times: The Land

A few weeks ago, however, winter arrived. Schools and businesses closed as howling winds drove the new, dry snow into deeper and deeper drifts. No one wants to get caught out in a blizzard in this country. I remember one year when the temperature dropped 70 degrees in one hour when a winter storm front slammed across the prairie. But instructors who cancel classes at Oglala Lakota College because of the weather have to make them up. So I took off across acres of snow-covered, drifting prairie with few—if any—other cars on the road to Wanblee. The highway was coated with ice, and fingers of drifts were creeping across it. The windchill factor was 40 degrees below zero. Miles in the distance I could see deep blue shadows falling across snow-covered Badlands, the sun shining only on the far tops of the buttes, as the shadows tumbled down into the canyons and arroyos. There were no houses in sight, and there would be none for ten more miles. "Well," I thought, "this sure isn't a day to get a flat tire!"

Oglala Lakota College: The Setting

Instructors at Oglala Lakota College must be certain their cars are always in good working condition, and that's not always easy when the average instructor

The average instructor drives 400-500 miles a week to class.

drives 400-500 miles a week to class. The college campus is highly unusual: as a decentralized college, Oglala Lakota College covers the entire Pine Ridge Reservation: over 5,000 square miles. Right in the geographic center of the reservation a visitor can find the main offices of the college, in the *Piye Wiconi* building on Three Mile Creek near Kyle. The president and three vice presidents, the registrar, financial aid office, the business office and a small central library are all located at this central site. This same building and a nearby Vocational Education Building house almost all of the faculty offices with a total of 35 full time faculty, 25% of them Native American.

However, almost no classes are taught at this site. Instead each village has a "college center," a building which contains at least two classrooms and office space for a center director, a counselor and a tutor—all Lakota people from that community. This staff works with the students in their own community, counseling and advising them and helping them to determine from semester to semester what classes to request for that particular community.

The average semester enrollment at the college is 980 with an FTE of 600, and approximately 90% of the students are Oglala Lakota. There are no dormitories, and it is very difficult to find housing on the reservation, so the remaining 10% tend to be local ranchers or other non-Indian people living on or near the reservation. Although students range in age from 18 through 60, the average student is 28 years old. Roughly 65% of the students are women, and close to 75% of the graduates over the past 20 years have been women.

Currently I chair the General Studies Department, which houses composition and literature as well as speech, history, political science, art, humanities, science, math, and study skills courses. General Studies, because it teaches much of the core curriculum, has been the place where the open admissions of our community-based college has put the most pressure. The department houses ten full-time faculty members and at least 20 part-time instructors per semester. Close to 50% of our students are GED graduates, and approximately 75% of our entering students are placed in either a developmental or a basic writing course based upon the results of a holistically scored essay. Roughly 25% of those students are recommended for the developmental class. So far we have seen no significant difference between high school graduates and GED graduates on this test, which either speaks well for the GED training given by our local tutors, or speaks poorly for the local high schools.

The Best of Times: The Culture

Many who have watched TV specials or read feature stories about the poverty and alcoholism on Pine Ridge have a hard time accepting the fact that the college is educating Native American students to stay on the reservation. Although it isn't unusual for young people to leave the reservation in search of a

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Letter from the Rez

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college education, job training, or employment, many return after a few years because they are lonesome for "home."

Home, first of all, means being a part of a unique group of people who share a powerful and proud heritage: the bloodlines of Crazy Horse, Red Cloud, Young Man Afraid of His Horses, Bad Wound, Chipps, Lone Wolf, and Little Wound, to name but a few.

Home is also a tapestry of traditions and values which tie Lakota people together. Cultural gatherings like summer powwows and dance contests, small community celebrations and enormous inter-tribal dances, local school celebrations and tribal festivities, all of these events create a sense of community and belonging which can't be duplicated. I have rich memories related to district and community meetings, where the talk goes on for hours into the night as each person is allowed his/her say, and few people leave until some consensus is reached. At reservation basketball games, standing room only crowds are not unusual when rival reservation towns meet. Everybody loves basketball. High school gyms fill with intense talk and laughter before any game.

Home is also the Lakota language. Lakota can be heard daily on the reservation in conversations, in

Home is also a tapestry of traditions and values.

stores, on the local KILI radio, and in a variety of family situations. Even for non-speakers, there is great comfort and warmth in hearing Lakota spoken. When returning to the reservation from Denver or LA or Boston or Albuquerque, people know when they hear someone speaking Lakota that they are truly home.

The Worst of Times: The Culture

There is great fear, however, that if vigilance is relaxed, the Lakota culture will disappear, diluted and washed away in a sea of non-Indian faces, values, and beliefs; Lakota speech engulfed by the sounds of the English language. There is no "old country" across the ocean where the language and culture are being preserved. If

they die here, they die forever. When my husband and I first came to the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1969, it was estimated that at least half of the children entering kindergarten spoke the Lakota language fluently. Today the figure is closer to 5%.

The Pine Ridge Reservation is located in Shannon County, officially the second poorest county in the

There is no "old country" across the ocean where the language and culture are being preserved.

United States. The unemployment rate on Pine Ridge is estimated to be 85%. Violence in such intense poverty is all too common, in spite of the strong sense of Lakota community.

A few weeks ago one of my students, Alex Red Buffalo*, was brutally murdered, beaten to death. He died slowly, probably in a great deal of pain. It was the first of the month and welfare checks were out. Traditionally this is a time when families go to the larger communities surrounding the reservation to shop for groceries and clothes, to get car parts and car repairs, and to buy other needed supplies. All too often, however, this is also the time when there is money for alcohol. If they go with the wrong people, my students can be gone for days. Reservation communities must gear for the disruption and the drinking behavior that accompany these times. Absenteeism in the local day schools, domestic altercation and violence, illness and depression all increase during this time. And my student, Alex, was a victim of this scenario, tortured and beaten to death in his own home by three young men on a drinking spree.

I had known Alex for many years. His father was one of my first students in the New Careers Program which first brought me and my husband Dowell to the reservation back in 1969 as VISTA volunteers. Alex was a gentle young man who laughed easily and was trying hard to be a successful college student. He did not ask for or deserve a brutal, tortured death. I was sick at heart when I heard of his murder. But I did not fall apart as I might have twenty years ago.

One of our newer instructors phoned me after she learned about Alex's death. He had been in her reading

* This and other names used in this article are fictitious to protect the privacy of my student's family.

and study skills class. I think it surprised her that I was so calm. "You have to understand," I said. "This isn't the first time I've had a student murdered." There was Ethel, who was beaten to death by her husband, and Wilbur, who was shot point blank in the head by a friend high on drugs at a Christmas bash. And there have been more. Students have also written chilling stories in their journals for composition class: stories of beatings and incest, abandonment and hunger, gang rape and torture. Stories to make my blood run cold. But as the years have passed, over twenty years now, I have resignedly come to accept that there is a great deal of violence in my students' lives.

After many years of observation, however, I know that my students will keep trying to make their lives work, to make their lives better. And often, the best,

"This isn't the first time I've had a student murdered."

most positive way they know to accomplish this feat is to go to college and get a degree.

Oglala Lakota College: A Brief History

This college where I first taught Alex's father, and to which his brother Paul just returned, was founded in 1971 by a group of Lakota leaders and visionaries who saw the need for reservation-based higher education. The college was designed first as a community college and began as an extension campus offering classes from the University of Colorado, and later from Black Hills State University. It was first known as the Lakota Higher Education Center and later was named Oglala Sioux Community College. Since being accredited in 1983, the college has developed into what we like to call a "four-year community college" because it still has a strong commitment to community involvement and development. Moreover, like most community colleges, OLC offers a large number of associate of arts and applied vocational degrees. However, to reflect the fact that the college offers several bachelor's degrees, the name of the college was changed again in 1983 to Oglala Lakota College. Currently, the college also is developing a master's degree in tribal management because there has been tremendous demand from former students and reservation employers for advanced degree programs.

In this vast, sparsely populated area, it has clearly been necessary for the college to play many roles. The population of the entire state of South Dakota is roughly 700,000 people, and on the reservation itself live an estimated 14,000 Lakota people. The closest major university is, perhaps surprisingly, the University of Wyoming, which is 300 miles away, and the nearest large city is Denver, over 350 miles away.

Even more importantly, most Lakota people don't want to leave the reservation. They want to be educated on the reservation, and they want to stay and work on the reservation. Accordingly, the mission statement of the college emphasizes cultural preservation, academic excellence with open admissions, community development, and tribal sovereignty.

In an effort to deal with the preservation and vitalization of the Lakota language and culture, the 12 member board of Oglala Lakota College, all of whom are tribal members, years ago mandated that all classes taught at the college, from vocational education through mathematics and literature, have a Lakota perspective. Exactly what is meant by "the Lakota perspective" is, and probably always will be, a matter for debate in college faculty and staff meetings. But instructors attempt to meet this challenge through a wide variety

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of strategies including the use of materials dealing with local problems and concerns, materials written by Lakota and other Native American authors, and materials written in the Lakota language.

The Best of All Times: The Students

As a people the Oglala Lakota have had to be very tough. They have had to learn to live with constant disappointment. Consider the fact that during the Indian Wars, the Lakota people never lost a major battle. "Impossible," some say. "They are a conquered people." Historically the "conquest" actually came at the treaty table. The United States Government would make peace and then sign a treaty which was supposed to be

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Letter from the Rez

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in force "as long as the grasses shall grow and the rivers shall flow." Sadly, all of these treaties have been broken, at least in part. That is why the elders will often say, "Trusting the word of the United States Government defeated the Lakota, not the battleground."

But with this toughness has also come a resiliency and wit, a sense what's truly essential in life, and the good humor to achieve it. If you ask most instructors at OLC why they are willing to drive so many miles a week and to live in such isolation from large libraries, book stores, theaters, and restaurants—THE CITY—they usually say, "It's the students. They are wonderful." And into the lives of Oglala Lakota College instructors flow everyday the most amazing people.

It is not at all unusual to have students come into the college center, stomping snow off of their feet after hitching 25 miles to class, because: (a) their car broke down, or (b) the road was drifted with snow, or (c) they ran out of gas on the way to class, or (d) they never had

With this toughness has also come a resiliency and wit, a sense what's truly essential in life, and the good humor to achieve it.

a car in the first place and routinely must find rides to class. It is also not unusual to have these same students arrive laughing and joking about their predicament. They can usually trust that fellow classmates, the center staff, or their instructor will respond to their plight in a spirit of community—since the same situation can occur to anyone at any given time. Every time my car has broken down on the rez, I've been rescued, sometimes within minutes, by students, by college staff, or by their relatives. Even though the land seems vast and lonely, I don't feel alone.

Sometimes students come to class with infants or toddlers in their arms because the baby-sitter (a) is sick, (b) ran off with a new boyfriend, (c) found a job, or (d) simply disappeared and no one knows where s/he is. Pine Ridge is a tough place to find a reliable baby-sitter.

With the high unemployment mentioned earlier, many people must crowd into existing housing space. It is not at all unusual for fourteen or fifteen people to be living in a house designed for a family of four or five. The stress of feeding, clothing, and meeting the needs of large families with very little money causes friction and periodic dysfunction. When my kids were in preschool on the reservation, I once went through four baby-sitters in a three month period.

Therefore, if a student brings a child to class, I know it's because on that day there is no other choice. Most Lakota children are accustomed to entertaining themselves quietly in the presence of adults. At most reservation gatherings all generations are present, so it doesn't seem strange to occasionally have these little ones in class. I've often held babies as they slept or watched me talk so their mothers could take notes or write an in-class essay. Sometimes I watch them grow. A toddler conceived when her mother was in Basic Writing slept on the floor in a warm blanket as her mother wrote her final essay for Freshman English last week. And in spite of the crowding, the distractions, the periodic frustrations and crises, her mother is doing a beautiful job in my class.

I don't know how many times I have heard tribal elders and elected tribal officials state that Oglala Lakota College is essential for the survival of the Lakota people. I have watched countless numbers of students seemingly recover, land on their feet and go on, after experiencing tragedy and degradation that would emotionally and physically destroy most middle-class Americans. These students are undoubtedly scarred by these tragedies, but miraculously they go on with a humor, a good will, and a sense of purpose that humble me. If Alex Red Buffalo's brother Paul can make it to basic writing class the Tuesday following his brother's funeral—which he did—then by God so can I! And neither of us has missed a class since.

Jeanne Smith teaches writing and literature and chairs the General Studies Department at Oglala Lakota College. Her 1987 Chevy Nova has 145,000 miles on it.

CBW at CCCC in Cincinnati

Bill Jones

Members of the executive committee of CBW thought for a brief moment that they had perhaps sabotaged their own special interest group (SIG) meeting in Cincinnati, having distributed the day before and earlier that Thursday flyers directing people to the right room in the wrong building. However, when the committee members found the right room in the right building, just minutes before the meeting was to begin, the crowd had already gathered. They had found their way to the room unaware of any mix-up, since the convention program book had printed the correct information. The meeting proceeded.

One of the first orders of business was to say good bye to Peter Dow Adams. Although I knew that chairs serve three-year terms, I wondered how someone who had literally, it seemed, put his mark on every document associated with CBW could no longer be an executive committee member. It was Peter's eye that had selected the elegant gray stock that newsletters and all other documents and correspondence were printed on, and his taste that had chosen clean Palatino as the CBW typeface, and his efforts that had revived and sustained the organization.

As he stepped down, Peter reminded us that the mere existence of CBW in CCCC was not an automatic assurance that the concerns of basic writing instructors would be heard. We would have to work at it. Peter pointed out that, curiously, for the first time, *basic writing* was not listed as a separate category in the topic index of concurrent sessions in the convention program book but

justify a separate listing. Even if the bad-news interpretation did not account for the change, to Peter's mind, it remained important that CBW members submit proposals and encourage colleagues to do the same, both for CCCC in San Diego and for the National Conference on Basic Writing in October at the University of Maryland.

The meeting was also, happily, an occasion to welcome the new chair, Suellen Duffey (Ohio State University),

"It feels so good to be here," a young instructor said.

whom Peter had appointed, in accordance with the CBW by-laws, to serve out the remainder of Carolyn Kirkpatrick's term as associate chair, when Carolyn stepped down to work with Gene Hammond (University of Maryland) on planning the National Basic Writing Conference set for October. Suellen is no stranger. CCCC in Boston had marked the end of her two years on the executive committee. CBW lore has it that she was present at the very first revived CBW meeting in St. Louis and on her feet, testifying to those assembled how she had been using a *Facts-Artifacts* approach with her basic writers. She was on her feet again, this time greeting us warmly and introducing Carolyn Kirkpatrick.

Carolyn brought good news. NCTE, she reported, had agreed to co-sponsor the October conference along with the University of Maryland and had absorbed the cost of mailing the conference announcement and call for proposals to all CCCC members. The conference, Carolyn felt, might satisfy basic writing instructors and researchers in ways other conferences do not, those that subordinate basic writing to what some consider more prestigious and intellectually respectable areas of writing instruction. The format of plenary panels, concurrent sessions, and the informality that Carolyn and Gene want to create should provide a forum where a full range of concerns can be addressed, taken up even in casual conversation, even among new acquaintances. (For details on the conference, see article beginning on page 1.)

We next gathered at round tables "to write ourselves

The existence of CBW in CCCC is not an automatic assurance that the concerns of basic writing instructors will be heard.

as a companion item of *first-year composition*, and that that listing could be interpreted two ways: either CCCC recognized that basic writing is an important feature of first-year writing for many students in higher education or CCCC was indicating that too few basic writing proposals of merit had been submitted and accepted to

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CBW Meeting at CCCC

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into clarity," to see whether those who had come to the SIG could identify the most pressing issues for basic writing instructors and propose solutions for them. While many busied themselves writing, others talked, encountering little difficulty finding those who would listen or debate, pleased, it seemed, to find easy understanding in the company of those who had the same things on their minds. "It feels so good to be here," a young instructor said. "How many of you would like to show up at my school on Monday?"

After writing, tablemates read what they had written, some paragraphs, others just short lists. Often some problem that had been written about was so provocative that discussion focused on it, making it almost impossible to move on to give others opportunities to read. But as time grew short, someone, usually an executive committee member, summarized the concerns of those at the tables for the larger group.

Keith Peterson (Brigham Young University, Laie, Hawaii), attending a CBW meeting for the first time, reported that his table had concerned itself with the ghettoization of students in basic writing, with how their lack of competence isolates and stigmatizes them, creating instructional situations difficult for students and instructors alike. They had spent time, too, he said, discussing effective tutor training.

Among the matters that Mary Kay Tirrell (California State University, Fullerton) presented was her tablemates' concern over minimum skills for basic writers, what those skills are, what students need to master. They too had discussed how institutions, not taking basic writing seriously, affected instructors isolating them and their students.

... to see whether those who had come to the SIG could identify the most pressing issues for basic writing instructors.

A discussion of institutional concerns occupied those at the next table, as Karen Uehling (Boise State) reported: unmanageable class size, the heavy reliance on part-time faculty for teaching basic writing courses and fuzzy thinking about the relationship between courses designated basic writing and those regarded as regular, surfacing, on occasion, in discussion about the relative

merits of expressive and expository writing for basic writers and resulting in an uneasy, often troubled relationship between the faculties who teach the separate courses.

Pamela Gay (SUNY/Binghamton) reported that her table noted how conflicts between instructors and students, rooted in issues of race, gender and class, often foster resistance to learning. Her table also commented on the frequency of burnout among basic writing instructors and the absence of respect and

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support for their teaching.

A similar problem of inadequate resources was isolated as a major concern when Sallyanne Fitzgerald (U of Missouri/St. Louis) reported for her table. One member of her group wondered whether it was possible to distribute the CBW Newsletter to all department heads where basic writing is taught. Perhaps the newsletter could be one more device for keeping issues that concern basic writing teachers before those who make important decisions.

Those at my own table had spent time discussing error, a particularly troublesome area for part-timers and new writing instructors, especially when they are left to fend for themselves. They wondered out loud, too, about how to keep students motivated enough to attend classes regularly and to take assignments seriously.

No one offered solutions to the problems we discussed. The obvious reason was that there was not enough time, but perhaps something else was at work: We had created a sense of community at those tables, had found pleasure in doing so, and perhaps needed each others' company more than we at first recognized. We left the tables still hungry. Perhaps that means that many of us will gather in October in Maryland to talk again, to move a bit closer to finding the solutions we need.

Bill Jones teaches basic writing at Rutgers University/ Newark, where he also chairs the Academic Foundations Department.

Review of *Grammar and the Teaching of Writing*

Karen Uehling

Grammar and the Teaching of Writing: Limits and Possibilities, by Rei Noguchi. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1991. \$10.50; NCTE members, \$7.95.

Last summer I was writing a basic writing text, and I desperately needed a workable approach to editing skills. Although I devoted most of my text to the act of saying something to someone for a reason, I knew I had to say *something* about editing. For two days I tried in vain to define a sentence. Wasn't there some simple way to deal with subjects, verbs, and complete thoughts? With delight I stumbled on Rei Noguchi's *Grammar and the Teaching of Writing*. The more I read, the more interested I became. Here was the basis for a practical, minimalist editing approach.

Noguchi rejects both the positions of the "anti grammarians" (his term) and the drill-and-kill traditionalists. He asks, instead, when, if at all, is grammar instruction profitable? He concludes, based on the triumvirate of rhetoric—invention, arrangement, and style—that grammar impacts only style. Thus he limits the scope of grammar instruction, freeing up valuable time to work on invention and arrangement.

Noguchi then advances an editing method he calls a "writer's grammar," derived from Lunsford and Connors' study of the most common errors college

Noguchi posits a minimalist grammar necessary for writing survival.

students make and Hairston's study of the errors that most offend readers. Based on this data, Noguchi posits a minimalist grammar necessary for writing survival: strategies for differentiating sentences from what he calls "nonsentences" and strategies for handling subjects, verbs, and modifiers (33).

Essentially an adaptation of generative-transformational grammar, Noguchi's writer's grammar exploits intuitive knowledge native speakers possess; it

is, unfortunately, less helpful to ESL speakers. Two features of the method apply especially well to basic writers: (1) a test frame for sentence completeness and (2) tag and yes/no question transformations.

The test frame for sentence completeness is, in my opinion, the more useful of the two. The test frame is "They refused to believe the idea that ____." If you plug a sequence of words into the slot, you will discover that only correct sentences fit. (This test does not work for questions or commands.) Here are some examples:

- They refused to believe the idea that Jim and Sue can dance the tango.
- They refused to believe the idea that the company, which employed many workers and made many different kinds of products, went out of business.
- They refused to believe the idea that the cost of the three typewriters and the four clocks will be raised.

On the other hand, incorrect sentences won't fit in the slot sensibly:

- They refused to believe the idea that enjoyed the baseball game on Saturday.
- They refused to believe the idea that whatever you could do to help my sister.
- They refused to believe the idea that the wind howling through the trees last night.
- They refused to believe the idea that your next-door neighbor is going to sell his car for \$400 he should sell it for \$800.
- They refused to believe the idea that Nancy, impatient as always, ripped off the cellophane wrapper of the package the icing of the cake came off with it. (56, 77)

The sentence test frame allows students easily to spot several kinds of fragments: *-ing* verbs alone, prepositional phrases, subordinate clauses. Yet none of these *terms* need be introduced. Students of mine who have tried this sentence frame test have generally been enthusiastic. One even called her old high school English teacher to explain her "miracle cure for fragments."

A second, albeit less useful, technique is the tag and yes/no question transformations. Tag questions are questions that follow a sentence and ask for confirmation. Yes-no questions are questions which require a "yes" or "no" answer; they follow naturally from tag questions. Here are some examples:

Continued on next page.

Review of Noguchi

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Sentence

- Jim and Sue can dance the tango.
- The company, which employed many workers and made many different kinds of products, went out of business.
- The cost of the three typewriters and the four clocks will be raised.

Tag question

- Jim and Sue can dance the tango, can't they?
- The company, which employed many workers and made many different kinds of products, went out of business, didn't it?
- The cost of the three typewriters and the four clocks will be raised, won't it?

Yes-No Question

- Can Jim and Sue dance the tango?
- Did the company, which employed many workers and made many different kinds of products, go out of business?
- Will the cost of the three typewriters and the four clocks be raised? (46-47)

Although forming tag and yes-no questions is somewhat confusing to students at first, with a little time to practice, it becomes relatively easy.

Tag and yes-no questions are especially useful in editing run-ons or comma splices. The tag question transforms a run-on or comma splice into two halves: one portion sounds like a statement, and one portion sounds like a question. The break point, of course, occurs between the statement and question—where the question begins. For example, "Your next-door neighbor is going to sell his car for \$400 he should sell it for \$800." Tag question transformation: Your next-door neighbor is going to sell his car for \$400 [break point] he should sell it for \$800, shouldn't he?

If students have difficulty identifying this point, Noguchi suggests having them listen with eyes closed while someone reads the item aloud. Once students have identified the break point, they must then edit the sentence using one of the four traditional methods of correction. Which method to use, of course, requires active decision making about the purpose, subject, and audience of the text, keeping the writer in charge.

The yes/no question makes the break point of a run-on or comma splice even more dramatic than the tag question because the yes/no question changes the word order of the sentence. Now our earlier example becomes

the following: Yes-no question transformation: Your next-door neighbor is going to sell his car for \$400 [break point] should he sell it for \$800?

Noguchi argues that tag and yes/no questions will work with fragments—and they will—but I feel the "They refused to believe the idea that _____" test is easier. Further, a student suggested using the "They refused to believe the idea that _____" test for run-ons: you keep applying the test at possible break points until you hear the sensible break point.

Tag questions are also helpful for testing subject-verb agreement. You form the tag question, then substitute the pronoun from the tag question for the subject of the sentence. For example, "A copy of the rules is on my desk." Tag question: A copy of the rules is on my desk, isn't it? Pronoun replacement: It is on my desk. Correct.

Another less clear idea from Noguchi is that of "presentence modifiers" (his term), modifiers that move when transformed by tag and yes-no questions. Such modifiers include adjectives, adverbs, prepositional phrases, other kinds of phrases, and clauses. Noguchi points out that these modifiers are fragments if written alone, so fragments can be corrected by treating them as presentence modifiers. After a presentence modifier is identified, the writer can decide where best to position it in a sentence, and where the commas go. The benefit of the presentence modifiers concept is that it subsumes several traditional grammatical terms under one heading, so learning is simplified.

Noguchi's book offers teachers an excellent background in the research on grammar instruction. The opening and closing chapters are informative, self-contained essays. Here explained very clearly was the reason I couldn't define a sentence. Grammar, as Patrick Hartwell has so aptly dubbed it, is COIK [clear only if known] because, as Noguchi argues, grammatical terms and concepts are an impenetrable, interlocking system.

Noguchi's final chapter, "The Paradoxes of Grammar Instruction," is especially useful. It's concise—only nine pages—and is set up in a clear, easy-to-follow format of questions and answers about grammar instruction. If you have time for nothing else, at least read this chapter. There is also an extensive bibliography on grammar instruction.

I am encouraged that a linguist finds writing instruction worthy of study. According to Robert Connors, after Bloomfield (1933), linguists essentially gave up on writing instruction and left writing teachers to grope their way along. Shaughnessy pointed out long

ago that our work must be interdisciplinary—Noguchi's study is an excellent contribution.

At times Noguchi's style is heavy and ponderous, overdone. Yet perhaps he felt the need to write in an overly elaborated academic voice to reach an academic audience, and he must argue with such a formidable opponent as Hartwell.

Noguchi also published an article in the *Journal of Basic Writing* in the fall of 1987 which offers the same basic approach without as many details and exceptions. This

We need to understand how powerful grammar is . . .

article helped me grasp the book, and I recommend it.

Grammar and the Teaching of Writing is an important book for basic writing teachers. We need to understand how powerful grammar is, how much it represses writers. Any tool that offers a simple, basic strategy for editing and allows more time for writing and revising demands our attention. As practitioners of basic writing, we can pull out the heart of this method and adapt it to our audience.

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Karen Uehling, who teaches basic writing at Boise State University, is author of the forthcoming text *Starting Out or Starting Over: A Guide for Writing*, to be published in 1993 by HarperCollins.

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Recent Articles on Basic Writing

Who Are Basic Writers?

"Reviews" this time focuses on our understandings and misunderstandings about who basic writers are—their linguistic skills, their life experiences, their attitudes about reading and writing. All stress the importance of revising our ideas about who our students—our primary audience—are, so that we can teach them more effectively and learn from them more readily.

Carol Severino. "Where the Cultures of Basic Writers and Academia Intersect: Cultivating the Common Ground." *Journal of Basic Writing* 11.1 (1992): 4-15. By analyzing the metaphors of "melting pot" and "salad bowl," Severino illustrates the importance of such metaphors in our thinking about multicultural identities/literacies. She focuses on the metaphors of transportation and in-group ("bridge," "guide," "inside," and "club"), indicating how our metaphors assume a unidirectional movement from students' cultures and languages to those of the university. She concludes by confounding some of our misconceptions about basic writers, her ideas based on her study of 45 basic writing students in Chicago. First, students read and write more than we commonly assume. Second, students have had more positive reading and writing experiences in high school—experiences that result in positive attitudes about writing—than we expect. We need to change our common stereotypes of basic writers, our curriculum, and our understanding about the one-directional flow of education.

Sally Barr Reagan. "Warning: Basic Writers at Risk—The Case of Javier." *Journal of Basic Writing* 10.2 (1991): 99-115. Research on basic writers in a linked reading-writing course at Indiana University suggests that some (approximately half in the study) fail not because of poor writing or limited intelligence, but because of social and cultural pressures that researchers like Ann Murphy, John Ogbu, Harriet Malinowitz, Sharon Nelson-Barber, and Terry Meier have discussed. Reagan suggests that, because current policies do not help some students and because our backgrounds often differ from those of our students, we need to approach our teaching as research and see problems as opportunities to explore, re-see,

Continued on next page.

Reviews

continued from page 13.

and adjust the curriculum. In short, we need to change how we see our students, their work, our teaching.

William E. Coles, Jr. "The Dialogues of Teaching: Learning to Listen." *Composition Studies: Freshman English News* 20.1 (1992): 34-46.

William Coles recreates the conflicting voices—within our community and within our selves—attendant to the changes Severino and Reagan call for. His essay embodies the struggle and the critical importance of such change for our students, our teaching, our selves.

This is a regular column discussing recent journal articles of interest to teachers and researchers working with basic writers. If you've recently written or read an article of interest, please send a copy to Sally Harrold, Department of English, Southwestern Oregon Community College, Coos Bay, OR 97420, for possible review.

Results of CBW Survey #3 Critical Issues in Basic Writing

We received only fifteen responses to last fall's survey, so the results cannot be interpreted in any way that would please a social scientist. Nevertheless, we thought readers might find responses to the most-answered questions interesting, especially as a prelude to the October conference.

What areas of BW instruction are most in need of improvement? What do you consider the most crucial issues concerning classroom practice?

- not enough time in one semester
- more attention to students' study skills and time management skills
- assessment
- in-service training for inexperienced teachers
- figuring out what methods work for which students
- skills vs content
- grammar, punctuation, and spelling
- the majority of teachers are still teaching a skill and drill approach rather than teaching writing
- how to avoid the deadliness of drill & kill while helping students improve their control over error

What issues or problems can you identify concerning the contexts in which BW instruction takes place?

- the way we exclude BWs from various "main streams"
- too often BW instruction is done by harried, underpaid, inexperienced part-timers
- class size
- preponderance of women teach BW indicating the low status of the profession
- assumption that BWs cannot handle sophisticated ideas so BW instructors do not need to either
- elimination of BW instruction at the university level
- lack of administrative support
- failure to see a need for qualified BW instructors
- clearer definition of goals and objectives for BW courses
- the class structure of the university
- lack of recognition that BW instruction is a specialized knowledge
- more facts about successes of BWs—follow-up studies

What research questions should the profession be addressing vis-a-vis BW?

- what are the previous writing experience and educational experience of BWs
- what are BWs: an archive of papers and profiles of BWs
- how can BWs best be taught to complete their assignments
- what is the experience of minority students
- questions concerning discourse communities
- how does our pedagogic past influence present teaching practices
- comparative studies of different pedagogies
- which approach is best: breaking instruction into steps or throwing students into the pool to sink or swim
- how well do writing groups work
- accuracy of placement tests
- topic preparation for assessment prompts
- is it wise to separate BWs from mainstream students
- would BWs be more likely to succeed if they were mainstreamed into freshman English
- what sort of grammar instruction helps BWs improve
- what programs have successfully taught grammar and mechanics
- do BW specialists actually do something better than non-BW specialists
- research into the effects on BW teachers of reading lots of basic writing
- how large can a BW class be and still "work"
- culture and gender bias
- do standards influence instruction and outcomes
- the differences between BW and literacy instruction

BULLETIN BOARD

The **Midwest Writing Centers Association** meets October 2-3, 1992, in St. Paul, MN, with the theme "Talking It Out: Writing Centers as Social Spaces." Steve North will be keynote speaker. Contact Dave Healy, General College, 240 Appleby Hall, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455.

The Fourth Miami University Conference on Writing will host a conference on **New Directions in Portfolio Assessment** on October 2-4 at Miami University in Oxford, OH. Write Portfolio Conference, Department of English, Miami University, Oxford, OH 45056 or call 513/529-7110/5221.

The eighth annual **Pacific Coast Writing Centers Association** Conference is scheduled for October 3 at Pepperdine University in Malibu, CA. Contact Cindy Novak, Humanities Division, Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA 90263.

The **Fourth National Basic Writing Conference** will convene at the University of Maryland, College Park, MD—on the outskirts of Washington DC—October 8-10. David Bartholomae will deliver the keynote address. For registration materials, contact John Garvey, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801. (See also the article beginning on page 1 of this newsletter.)

A conference on **The Writing Process: Retrospect and Prospect** will be held at the University of New Hampshire October 9-11. Featured speakers include Lil Brannon, James Britton, Lisa Ede, Peter Elbow, Janet Emig, Ken Macrorie, James Moffett, and Donald Murray. Write Christine Ransom, English Department, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824.

The **National Conference on Peer Tutoring and Writing** will focus on the topic "All About Talk" at Indiana University of Pennsylvania on October 23-24. Contact Lea Masiello or Ben Rafter, English Department, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA 15705-1094 or call 412/357-3029.

The 17th annual **Boston University Conference on Language Development** will be held October 23-25. Focusing on the theme "First and Second Language Acquisition," the conference will highlight research reports. Write to Conference on Language Development, Boston University, 138 Mountford St., Boston, MA 02215 or call 617/353-3085.

The annual convention of the **National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)** takes place this year in Louisville, KY, November 18-23.

The **Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA)** is a nationwide organization that fosters communication and community among writing program administrators. It provides colleges and universities with consultant-evaluators to assess writing programs, and it sponsors a wide variety of professional activities to assist new and experienced writing program administrators and to bring together writing administrators from all parts of the country. For membership information, write Jeff Sommers, Department of English, Miami University, Oxford, OH 45056.

The *Journal of Basic Writing* invites submissions related to all aspects of basic writing. Of particular interest are accounts of teaching under unusual or difficult circumstances, cross-cultural reports, experiences with the new technologies, and articles taking a fresh approach to their topic. Write editors Peter Miller and Bill Bernhardt, *Journal of Basic Writing*, 535 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10021.

The *Writing Lab Newsletter* is an informal means of exchanging information among those who work in writing labs and language skills centers. Brief articles describing labs, their instructional methods and materials, goals, programs, budgets, staffing, services, etc. are invited. Those wishing to subscribe are requested to make a donation of \$10 per year, checks payable to Purdue University. Submissions and memberships should be sent to Muriel Harris, Editor, *Writing Lab Newsletter*, Department of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907.

CBW Newsletter is happy to print in the "Bulletin Board" announcements that are likely to be of interest to its readers. Send such announcements to the editors by October 15 for the fall issue.

Conference on Basic Writing
c/o Peter Dow Adams
English Department
Essex Community College
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TO:

